



February 21, 2006

Message from the Assistant Secretary

Accelerating the Transformation of Long-Term Care Systems

I would like to take the opportunity to recognize members of the National Aging Services Network for your dedication in successfully serving a large number of older Americans under the Older Americans Act during this past year. The latest data shows that OAA programs served more than eight million older adults and more than half a million caregivers through our numerous programs in 2004. For example, the Network provided case management services to 404,000 persons (3.8 million hours) to assess needs, develop care plans, and arrange services. Recipients rate these services highly and these services are effectively targeted to vulnerable individuals and those who need services.

Now for a look to the future. As part of the President's FY 2007 budget that HHS Secretary Leavitt announced on February 6, Choices for Independence, a proposal to modernize the Older Americans Act programs and services. Choices builds upon recent HHS initiatives and the unique assets of the Aging Services Network to focus on helping older adults remain in their homes. Choices embodies a three-pronged strategy that states will be able to use to accelerate the transformation of long-term care systems to better address the needs of the aging baby boom generation and make services more consumer-directed and more supportive of community living.

We have already taken a number of steps along the path of modernizing our services through initiatives such as the "one-stop-shop" Aging and Disabilities Resource Centers, AoA Evidence-Based Prevention Grant Program, and the Own Your Own Future pilot program. I am energized by the opportunity to continue to work with you and the other members of the Network during this year as we renew our commitment to improving the quality of life for all older Americans. For more information about the FY 2007 budget and the Choices for Independence visit www.aoa.gov.

Josefina G. Carbonell

Top Stories

Secretary Leavitt Issues Progress Report on Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit

On February 1, HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt today released a one-month progress report on the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit that takes a hard look at what is working and what needs to improve. The report details action steps HHS and health plans are taking, such as extending transition coverage for a beneficiary's current

drugs to 90 days and reducing call wait times. The report also includes new estimates showing the costs of the Medicare drug benefit are significantly less than expected. Leavitt noted that call wait times for pharmacists and customers had been "unacceptable," and announced efforts to get them significantly reduced. The call-wait time for 1-800-MEDICARE has been around five minutes since the beginning of January, and, at the end of the month, the time was even shorter (less than a minute). While most plans have also taken steps to reduce wait times for customers and pharmacists to acceptable levels, HHS will increase its monitoring and reporting of drug plan wait times and will take corrective actions in the specific cases where plans do not improve. The progress report also highlights new information about significant savings for taxpayers. The Secretary notes that the latest estimates show that the costs of the Medicare prescription drug benefit are significantly less than expected. Examples include:

- Latest estimates project premiums of \$25 a month - about a third less than previously estimated.
- The federal government is now projected to spend about 20 percent less per person in 2006 and, over the next five years, payments are projected to be more than 10 percent lower than first estimated.

At the report's conclusion, the Secretary outlines action steps that Medicare is taking to continue making improvements. A copy of the full report is available at <http://www.hhs.gov/secretaryspage.html>.

FDA Announces New Prescription Drug Information Format

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration unveiled a major revision to the format of prescription drug information, commonly called the package insert on January 18 that has been revised for the first time in more than 25 years. In an effort to manage the risks of medication use and reduce medical errors, the newly designed package insert will provide the most up-to-date information in an easy-to-read format that draws physician and patient attention to the most important pieces of drug information before a product is prescribed. The new format will also make prescription information more accessible for use with electronic prescribing tools and other electronic information resources. For the full press release go to: <http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2005/NEW01272.html>.

Upcoming NCOA-ASA Joint Conference Expects to Draw more than 4,000 Participants

Join the more than 4,000 participants in Anaheim, California for the *Invest in Aging* Conference sponsored by the National Council on the Aging and the American Society on Aging on March 16-19, 2006. The conference is comprised of more than 1,000 sessions that covers all aspects of aging and multiple elements such as Pre-conference events and Special Programs. For more information visit: www.agingconference.org.

AoA News

AoA Release of Senior Transportation Resources

AoA recently released a set of new transportation resources. "Seniors Benefit from Transportation Partnerships: Promising Practices from the Aging Network," is a 'toolbox' of technical assistance materials developed to increase the provision and coordination of transportation services for older Americans. These resources are a component of a multi-faceted initiative undertaken to assist State Units on Aging, Area Agencies on Aging, tribal organizations and community partners to increase the quantity, quality and efficiency of transportation services for seniors. Coordination is the key to making this happen.

This toolbox contains important information in a CD format that follows through on AoA's commitments to support the President's Executive Order on Human Services Transportation Coordination. The resources in the toolbox include useful practices in transportation coordination, a handbook for creating door through door transportation programs, a template for communities to build their own transportation resource guide, a comprehensive resource list for transportation coordination and a presentation on useful practices that can be tailored for different audiences. AoA announced these resources as part of our ongoing commitment and relationship with the United We Ride Interagency Transportation Coordination Initiative. AoA has been mailed out a copy of the executive summary and the CD to the aging network, but the information is also immediately available on our website at: <http://www.aoa.gov/prof/transportation/transportation.asp>

Other News

Improving End-of-Life Care NIH Conference Proceedings Now Available

The proceedings of a National Institutes of Health "State-of-the-Science on Improving End-of-Life Care" have been published in a special supplement of the "Journal of Palliative Medicine." The NIH State-of-the-Science Conference on Improving End of Life Care, held December 6-8, 2004, brought together prominent clinicians and researchers with expertise in a broad range of topics related to end-of-life care. The dramatic increase in the number of older adults facing the need for end-of-life care warrants development of a research infrastructure and resources to enhance that care for patients and their families. These experts synthesized research on key issues: defining end of life, understanding major considerations related to end of life care, and developing interventions that positively impact symptom management, social interactions, spirituality, and caregiver support. An independent panel evaluated the expert testimony and identified critical directions for future research. NINR is the designated lead institute in studying end of life. The journal is a peer-reviewed publication of Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., and the official journal of the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine. The NIH Office of Medical Applications of Research and the National Institute of Nursing Research were the primary sponsors of the conference. The supplement is available free online at www.liebertpub.com/jpm.

Civic Ventures to Invest in Social Entrepreneurs Who Lead with Experience

Civic Ventures is accepting nominations for the Purpose Prize, five \$100,000 investments in Americans over the age of 60 who are combining their passion, creativity, experience and entrepreneurial skills to tackle issues of social significance. The nonprofit think tank and program incubator will also honor sixty semi-finalists for their social innovations. The Prize is part of a new national initiative to inspire and encourage millions of Americans to use their experience for the greater good as they reach the cusp of what once was called "retirement." The \$9 million effort, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies and The John Templeton Foundation, includes a national summit to convene experienced and aspiring social innovators from across the country. A \$1.5 million Fund for Innovation will provide grants to help prize winners and finalists expand their community work and take breakthrough ideas to scale. Civic Ventures is accepting nominations, including self nominations and the application deadline is February 28, 2006. The first awards will be made in June, 2006. For more information about the Purpose Prize, to make a nomination, or to access a new online guide for journalists covering the aging of Baby Boomers visit: www.LeadWithExperience.org.

Making a Difference

MinnesotaHelp Information Network: Assisting Consumers in Accessing Technology Resources

The State of Minnesota is employing a MinnesotaHelp Information Network as an important strategy to meet the information and decision-making needs of seniors and people with disabilities now and in the future. The state is creating this network as part of the Aging and Disabilities Resource Center grant that they received from AoA and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The Network will provide the human interface between technology resources and individuals, their families and caregivers, who need personalized assistance to find and access needed long term care services. Access to the Network will be available in the form of an online resource directory in places where people currently seek and receive information such as health clinics, community agencies, hospitals, libraries, senior centers, faith communities and places where they work. These access points, or Network Portals, are the entry point to different ways of obtaining help. For example, a Network Portal for area employees will be created to reach caregivers and promote earlier proactive planning for their future. Creating Network Portals in diverse settings will help to target a variety of populations who may need long term care services.

Each Network Portal site will receive a Network Portal Tool Kit. The Tool Kit offered to the first sites will consist of computers/lap-tops, as needed, for office and in-home visits, internet access, training materials and staff training on how to navigate and use the resource database and other web-based tools such as a Consumer Decision Tools. Kiosk cards and card holders, posters, signage and marketing materials will also be included. Public and private agencies and organizations play complementary roles in making Network Portals work. Public funds pay for infrastructure and consultation while community agencies, hospitals, and libraries provide a vast array of direct assistance by using the web-based tools and information or by linking people to information, assistance and consultation. Ultimately, the hope is to increase the number of options people consider in long term care decision making as

well as their knowledge of available resources. For more information visit:
www.MinnesotaHelp.info.

For more information about Aging News, please visit:

<http://www.aoa.gov/press/news/news.asp>

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About AoA

AoA works with a nationwide network of organizations and service providers to make support services and resources available to older persons and their caregivers. For more information about AoA, please contact us by mail at U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging, Washington, DC 20201; by phone at (202) 619-0724; by e-mail at aoainfo@aoa.gov; or visit us on the Web at www.aoa.gov.